

Household Food Insecurity in Canada in 2021: Webinar Follow-up

Thank you for joining us for our webinar with Food Secure Canada on the current state of food insecurity in Canada, who are most at risk, and the evidence-based policy interventions to address this problem, based on our latest report, *Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

This document provides links to additional resources and references to publications cited during the presentation.

Links

Webinar

- [Recording](#)
- [Webinar slides \(EN\)](#)
- [Webinar slides \(FR\)](#)

Report

- [Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2021 \(EN\)](#)
- [Insécurité Alimentaire des Ménages au Canada, 2021 \(FR\)](#)

Looking for more information about household food insecurity in Canada? We recently updated our [Household Food Insecurity in Canada](#) summary webpages to provide a comprehensive look at food insecurity through 4 major questions.

- [How many Canadians are affected by household food insecurity?](#)
- [Who are most at risk of household food insecurity?](#)
- [What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care?](#)
- [What can be done to reduce food insecurity in Canada?](#)

PROOF

- <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

Food Secure Canada:

- <https://foodsecurecanada.org/>
- <https://alimentationdurable.ca>

Key Takeaways

- **In 2021, almost 1 in 6 households in the ten provinces were food-insecure.** That translates to 5.8 million people, including 1.4 million children, living in households with inadequate or insecure access to food, prior to this current period of record inflation.
- **Household food insecurity indicates pervasive material deprivation.** By the time a household is struggling to put food on the table because of a lack of money, they are also compromising other basic needs like housing and prescription medication.
- **The sociodemographic profile of food-insecure households reflects the patterns of social and economic disadvantage in Canada.** The households most at risk are those with low income, few assets, renting, lone parents, identifying as Indigenous or racialized, and reliant on social assistance or Employment Insurance.
- **Household food insecurity is a serious public health problem because it is tightly linked with so many adverse health outcomes.** Because of its toxic effects on health, it also places a substantial burden on our health care system and expenditure.
- **Food insecurity is sensitive to interventions that improve low-income households' incomes.** Research on various federal and provincial policies, including child benefits, social assistance, minimum wage, and public old-age pensions show that policies reduce food insecurity when they provide low-income households with more money.
- **The risk of food insecurity depends in part on which province or territory you live in Canada.** Research has highlighted the important roles that provincial and territorial governments play in protecting their populations from food insecurity, through policies like minimum wage, welfare, and taxation.
- **The evidence does not support food subsidies as a way to address food insecurity.** Food insecurity has worsened in Nunavut following the introduction of Nutrition North, the federal food subsidy program for remote Northern communities, and remains a massive problem despite continued investment.
- **The evidence does not support publicly funded school food programs as a way to address food insecurity,** in light of other policy options, like child benefits, that tackle the income inadequacy underlying food insecurity and would more effectively reduce rates in Canada.

Reducing household food insecurity requires the commitment of public revenue and resources to ensure that income supports for low-income, working-aged Canadians and their families are adequate, secure, and responsive to changing costs of living, irrespective of their income source.

Continuing the Conversation

We thank all the attendees for their thoughtful questions during the webinar. We've summarized some key ideas and next steps for research and advocacy based on the questions we received.

The future of household food insecurity monitoring in Canada

Our report, [Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2021](#), is based on data collected through the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) from 2019 to 2021. The addition of food insecurity to the CIS is an important step forward because it now ensures consistent, annual measurement of household food insecurity, which was not always the case through the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS).

The more robust labour and household economic data collected through the Canadian Income Survey will also be instrumental for advancing the understanding of household food insecurity in Canada and effective policy interventions.

With the new source of food insecurity data in Canada, it is important to acknowledge the differences between estimates from the CIS and CCHS and differences in ways this data is reported. Please see "*How is food insecurity measured in Canada?*" p8-10 in [Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2021](#) for more information.

Since CIS has a higher response rate than CCHS, meaning more of the people it is intended to reach have responded to it, we believe that it may provide more representative estimates for food insecurity than CCHS. Combined with the consistent measurement, the CIS is the best source of information on food insecurity in Canada and what governments should be using to track the problem, set targets, and identify priorities for policy intervention. For more, please see "[Moment of reckoning for household food insecurity monitoring in Canada](#)".

Since the CCHS and CIS exclude individuals living on-reserve, data from these surveys do not represent the experience of First Nations people living on-reserve, who represent nearly half of status First Nations peoples in Canada. Off-reserve Indigenous Peoples are also underrepresented in our latest report due to the current lack of data on those living in the territories.

The disproportionately high rate of food insecurity among off-reserve Indigenous Peoples in the provinces documented by the CIS points to the impact of colonialism and the need to advance reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination.

Indigenous-led research and solutions are essential. [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami \(ITK\)](#), the national representative organization for Inuit in Canada, has launched "[Qanuipitaa? National Inuit](#)

[Health Survey](#)”, a permanent Inuit-led survey that would reach all communities in Inuit Nunangat, and the [Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy](#), a plan for Inuit-led food security and poverty reduction initiatives.

The CIS only began collecting race-based data in 2021, so our report is a first look at the relationship between food insecurity and race through this survey. It is important to continue examining the relationship through future cycles of the CIS and collect more race-based data through other population surveys to better understand systemic racism in our institutions and what we need to do to provide equity and accessibility in our labour and housing markets, social programs, and healthcare systems.

Addressing household food insecurity through a Basic Income Guarantee

The best evidence we have of the impact of a basic income on food insecurity in Canada is research showing that when a low-income older adult in Canada turns 65 and becomes eligible for public pensions (Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement), their risk of food insecurity drops by half.

Establishing an income floor for all Canadians is a promising strategy for reducing food insecurity because it recognizes the need to reach low-income households in and out of the workforce.

Given the tight relationship between low income and food insecurity, particularly severe food insecurity, ensuring that households have a secure, adequate guaranteed income to afford the necessities would go a long way for addressing this problem.

Advocacy for effective policy interventions & actions to reduce household food insecurity

While policies that have been shown to move the needle on food insecurity in Canada are those at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels, municipal governments and community organizations can have pivotal roles in raising awareness of the problem and advocating for effective, permanent solutions.

It is critical to acknowledge that community programs cannot solve the problem and highlight the responsibility for federal, provincial, and territorial governments to act on policies like child benefits, social assistance, and minimum wage to reduce food insecurity.

Some recent examples of advocacy from municipal governments include motions passed in [Moncton](#) and [Halifax](#) to call upon their provincial and federal counterparts to implement a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income to address poverty. See also [The Case for Basic Income and Municipalities](#) from Coalition Canada, Ontario Basic Income Network, and Basic Income Canada Youth Network.

Since most of food-insecure households rely on employment income, it is also important for municipalities and other organizations to pay adequate wages that enable employees to be food secure and create more fair employment opportunities for low-income people in their communities.

The role for public health and healthcare professionals

Health professionals and their representing organizations can provide a unique perspective to advocacy for policy action, given the serious consequences for health and the healthcare system.

“The way to treat this is good policy – policy that supports income for low-income households. The more money people will have, the more likely that low-income households will be able to address their food insecurity”. – Dr. Naheed Dosani, palliative care physician, speaking with CTV News on household food insecurity and the new PROOF report ([August 22, 2022](#))

[Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#) have long advocated for policies like increases to social assistance, higher minimum wage, and a basic income guarantee.

Healthcare providers may also be in the position to determine access to additional benefits, like disability benefits or subsidized drugs, which can improve people’s financial circumstances and reduce the health inequity associated with food insecurity.

“Insofar as healthcare providers are the gatekeepers to additional benefits, you need to open those gates as wide as you can and as often as you can.” – Dr. Valerie Tarasuk, response to question during webinar

It is important to reflect on the appropriateness and effectiveness of screening for food insecurity in healthcare settings and food prescription programs. Since food prescriptions do not address the underlying drivers of food insecurity, there are serious questions around what, if any, kinds of impact they have, and whether any health benefits are sustained if those drivers remain unaddressed. Also see [Identification of Food Insecurity in Healthcare Settings: Recommendations for Nutrition Services, Alberta Health Services](#) and the commentary [“Reconsidering Food Prescription Programs in Relation to Household Food Insecurity”](#) in The Journal of Nutrition.

If you have additional questions or would like help accessing other resources, please get in touch at: proof@utoronto.ca

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